

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /062 W
-----101733Z 021112 /53

R 101251Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4011
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBUUY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L F C T I O N 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 8339

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS: OUTLOOK AS BALLOTING
BEGINS

REF: NEW DELHI 7963

SUMMARY. POLLING I THE STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS BEGINS TODAY.
THE CAMPAIGN SEEMS TO BE AN ANTI-CLIMAT AFTER THE EXCITEMENT
OF THE LOK SABHA POLL, WITH VOTER APATHY HIGH, POLITICAL
ACTIVITY IN A LOW KEY AND VOTER TURNOUT LIKELY TO BE RATHER
LIGHT. NO NEW GROUND HAS BEEN BROKEN IN TERMS OF ISSUES OR
RHETORIC, AND LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES WILL PROBABLY
BE MORE SIGNIFICANT FACTORS THAN IN MARCH. THE TICKET SCRAMBLE
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STILL TARNISHES JANATA'S IMAGE, BUT CONGRESS CONTINUES TO
BE PLAGUED BY DISSENSION AND DEMORALIZATION. THE ELECTORAL
APPEAL OF THOSE JANATA "REBELS" STILL IN THE RACE REMAINS THE
MAJOR IMPONDERABLE FACTOR. EXCEPT FOR TAMIL NADU AND WEST
BENGAL, MOST OBSERVERS PREDICT THAT JANATA WILL WIN "COMFOR-
TABLE" MAJORITIES IN THE ASSEMBLIES. THESE GENERAL EXPECTA-O
TIONS OF JANATA MAJORITIES IN EIGHT OF THE TEN STATES WHERE

POLLING IS TO TAKE PLACE HAVE BECOME A BENCHMARK AGAINST WHICH THE ACTUAL OUTCOME, WHICH WE BELIEVE IS NOT PREDICTABLE IS LIKELY O BE MEASURED. THE ELECTIONS WILL BE FOLLOWED BY POSSIBLY PROLONGED STRUGGLES OVER THE FORMATION OF STATE GOVERNMENTS. FROM THE NATIONAL VIEWPOINT, THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS NEXT STEP IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS WILL BE WHAT IT SIGNIFIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE AMONG KEY NATIONAL FIGURES AND WHAT IT COULD MEAN FOR THE COHESION OF THE JANATA PARTY. A POOR CONGRESS SHOWING WOULD PRE-SUMABLY STRENGTHEN THE HANDS OF THOSE ANXIOUS TO OUST MRS. GANDHI AND HER ASSOCIATES AND COULD ALSO SET THE STAGE FOR FURTHER DEFECTIONS FROM THE PARTY. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH POLLING BEGINNING IN SOME AREAS TODAY, CAMPAIGNING IN THE STAT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS HAS BEGUN TO WIND DOWN, IN MANY PLACES BEFORE IT EVER REALLY MOVED INTO HIGH GEAR. PROMINENT JANATA AND CONGRESS LEADERS HAVE BEEN OUT ON THE HUSTINGS IN GREAAATER NUMBERS DURING THE PAST WEEK, BUT THEIR APPEARANCES HAVE BEEN FEWER AND AUDIENCES SMALLER THAN IN THE LOK SABHA RACE, AND BOTH THE HAT AND SHORTAGE OF FUNDS HAVE RESTRICTED CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY. VIRTUALLY ALL OBSERVERS SAY THE ELECTORAATE IS APATHETIC AND INDIFFERENT ANDTHAT PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE ELECTIONS IS THE LOWEST IN MEMORY. COMING SO CLOSELY ON THE HEELS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY POLL, THE ELECTIONS SEEM TO BE AN ANTI-CLIMAX, AND THE GENERAL FEELING IS THAT VOTER TURNOUT WILL BE VERY LOW, SOMEWHERE IN THE RANGE OF 40 TO 50 PERCENT. CAMPAIGNING HAS BEEN GENERALLY SMOOTH AND FREE FROM VIOLENCE, AND WE HAVE HARD VIRTUALLY NO CHARGES OF POSSIBLE RIGGING OR OTHER CORRUPT CAMPAIGN
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ACTIVITIES.

2. THE ISSUES AND CAMPAIGN RHETORIC, SUCH AS THEY ARE, REMAIN MUCH THE SAME AS REPORTED IN REFTEL. JANATA CONTINUES TO BASE ITS APPEAL ON THE CLAIM THAT ITS VICTORY IN THE STATES WILL EMPOWER IT TO FINISH THE JOB GEGUN IN MARCH. CONGRESS SEEKS TO HIGHLIGHT THE JANATA'S SHORT-COMINGS BY POINTING TO RISING PRICES, INCRASED CRIME AND POWER AND WATER SHORTAGES. OBSERVERS FEEL, HOWEVER, THAT LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES, AWEELL AS THESE BROADER MATTERS IN THE VOTERS' MINDS.

3. JANATA CONTINUES TO SUFFER A TARNISHED IMAGE FROM ITS T TICKET SCRAMBLE OF SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, BUT CONGRESS HAS APPARENTLY NOT BENEFITED FROM THIS ISSUE DUE TO THE DISSENSION AND ACUTE DEMORALIZATION IN ITS OWN RANKS. MANY JANATA "REBELS" REMAIN IN THE RUNNING, AND THEIR POTENTIAL TO SPLIT THE JANATA VOTE IS THE MAJOR IMPONDERABLE FACTOR IN THESE ELECTIONS. OUR SOURCES TELL US THAT OF THE HUNDREDS

OF INDEPENDENTS AND REBELS IN THE FRAY, ONLY A HANDFUL ARE
"SERIOUS" CANDIDATES WHO STAND A CHANCE OF WINNING. THESE
ARE MOSTLY JANATA SUPPORTERS WHO HAD OPPOSED THE EMERGENCY OR
SUFFERED IN JAIL BUT WERE DENIED JANATA TICKETS IN FAVOR
OF RECENT CONGRESS DEFECTORS.

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

4. WHILE ALL OBSERVERS DO NOT AGREE ON THE SIZE OF THE
MARGIN, THERE IS A GENERAL CONSENSUS THAT JANATA (AND IN
PUNJAB THE JANATA/AKALI COMBINED) WILL WIN "COMFORTABLE"
MAJORITIES IN EIGHT OF THE TEN STATES GOING TO THE POLLS. WITH
THE PERCENTAGE OF SEATS SECURED BY THE PARTY SOMEWHERE IN
THE RANGE OF 55 TO 65. PERCENT, CONSIDERABLY LESS IN THESE
AREAS THAN IN THE LOK SABHA SWEEP. ONLY IN TAMIL NADU AND
WEST BENGAL DOES IT APPEAR TO OBSERVERS THAT THE PARTY WILL
FINISH NO BETTER THAN SECOND, A FORECAST EVEN JANATA LEADERS
AGREE WITH. THE MAJOR POINT OF SPECULATION IN THESE TWO STATES
IS WHETHER THE AIADMK AND CPM RESPECTIVELY WILL SECURE CLEAR
MAJORITIES ON THEIR OWN OR WHETHER THEY WILL HAVE TO FORM
COALITION GOVERNMENTS. THE EMBASSY, OF COURSE, IS IN NO
POSITION TO MAKE A PREDICTION OF IT. (WE DO NOT BELIEVE

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IN ANY EVENT THAT THE VICTORY OF THE MAHARASHTRA WADI GOMANTAK PARTY IN THE JUNE 1 GOA ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND THE POOR JANATA SHOWING THERE ARE ANY INDICATION OF THE LIKELY OUTCOME IN OTHER STATES.)

5. THESE GENERAL EXPECTATIONS OF COMFORTABLE JANATA MAJORITIES IN EIGHT OF THE TEN STATES GOING TO THE POOLS, STRESSED BY JANATA LEADERS AS WELL AS OTHER MORE OBJECTIVE OBSERVERS, HAVE BECOME A BENCHMARK AGAINST WHICH THE ACTUAL OUTCOME IS LIKELY TO BE MEASURED. THUS IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT IF JANATA DOES AS WELL AS IT IS EXPECTED TO DO, THIS WILL BE GENERALLY REGARDED AS CONFIRMATION OF THE NATIONAL MANDATE THE PARTY WON IN THE LOK SABHA RACE. IT SHOULD ALSO BOOST THE MORALE OF PARTY LEADERS AND FUNCTIONARIES. THE INSTALLATION OF SECURE JANATA MINISTRIES IN THE EIGHT STATES WILL ALSO FACILITATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS, A POINT JANATA LEADERS HAVE STRESSED TO US. BY THE SAME TOKEN, A "SUB-STANDARD" JANATA PERFORMANCE WILL TEND TO DAMAGE THE PARTY'S SELF-CONFIDENCE, PARTICULARLY IF ITS SETBACK IS MARKED BY CONGRESS GAINS, AND THE RECRIMINATIONS WHICH THEIR RETURNS WILL PRODUCE ARE LIKELY TO EXACERBATE DIVISIONS WITHIN ITS RANKS. SUCH AN OUTCOME WILL ALSO LEAD TO DUBIOUS CLAIMS THAT THE PARTY'S NATIONAL MANDATE HAS BEEN SHAKEN, BUT IT SHOULD NOT AFFECT THE GOI'S ABILITY TO GOVERN AT THE CENTER IN ANY MEANINGFUL WAY.

6. THE RESULTS WILL BE CLOSELY EXAMINED BY POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE NEXT STEP IN THE INDIAN POLITICAL PROCESS. THE THE FORMATION OF STATE GOVERNMENTS BY THE NEWLY-ELECTED LEGISLATURES. FROM THE NATIONAL VIEWPOINT, THE IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS NEXT STEP WILL BE WHAT IT SIGNIFIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE AMONG KEY NATIONAL FIGURES AND WHAT IT WILL MEAN FOR THE COHESION OF THE JANATA PARTY. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW STATE GOVERNMENTS COULD BE A LONG AND ACrimonious ONE IN SEVERAL CASES. U.P. WILL

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PROBABLY SEE THE HARDEST FIGHTING AS HOME MINISTER/BLD BOSS CHARAN SING AND PETROLEUM MINISTER CHIEF H. N. BAHUGUNA SEEK TO PLAY THE KING MAKER ROLE IN THE EXPECTATION THAT THE NW STATE LEADERSHIP WILL SUPPORT THEIR NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS. PRESIDENT'S RULE IN U. P. AND SEVERAL OTHER STATES MAY HAVE TO BE PROLONGED AS THE BATTLE FOR THE

CHIEF MINISTERSHIP AND THE ALLOCATION OF OTHER CABINET
PORTFOLIOS GOES ON.

7. THE ELECTION RESULTS WILL ALSO BE CLOSELY EXAMINED IN
THE CONTEXT OF THIS SUMMER'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. THE
JANATA LEADERSHIP HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT WANTS TO WIN
ENOUGH STATE ASSEMBLY SEATS TO ENSURE THE VICTORY OF ITS
CANDIDATE IN AUGUST. HAVING THUS PLACED ITS PRESTIGE ON THE
LINE, THE PARTY COULD SUFFER A MAJOR SETBACK IF IT FAILS TO
SECURE ENOUGH SEATS TO CLINCH THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.
IN THIS EVENT, IT MAY BE FORCED INTO THE EMBARRASSING
POSITION OF REVERSING ITS PREVIOUS STATEMENTS AND ACCEPTING
THE SO-CALLED "REBELS" BACK INTO ITS FOLD SO THAT THE
PRESIDENTIAL POLL'S OUTCOME IS ASSURED.

8. SHOULD THE CONGRESS PERFORM POORLY BY ITS OWN ESTIMATION
IN THE ASSEMBLY POLL, THE HANDS OF THOSE ANXIOUS TO OUST
MRS. GANDHI AND HER ASSOCIATES WOULD PRESUMABLY BE STRENGTHENED.
SUCH A POOR SHOWING COULD ALSO SET THE STAGE FOR A NEW ROUND
OF SIGNIFICANT DEFECTIONS FROM THE PARTY ON A SCALE LARGER
THAN WHAT IS CURRENTLY RUMORED IN DELHI TO BE IN THE POST-
ELECTION CARDS (E.G. 60 OR MORE CONGRESS MLA'S IN MAHARA-
SHTRA).
GOHEEN

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